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A frigate-bird off Yorkshire

by A. PATERSON

Received 13th February, 1968

At about noon on 15th October, 1966, I was watching seabirds at Filey Brigg on the north-east coast of England when I saw a bird larger than a Gannet, *Sula bassana* (of which some were present), and of a totally different shape and coloration, appearing at first to be entirely black and white, flying south into a strong southerly wind. From the time when I first saw it until it passed out of range I was able to watch through either a 20 X telescope or 7 x 50 binoculars for at least four minutes at distances down to 500 yards in a good light. The following field description is compiled from notes that I made at the time:—

The general shape was long and streamlined, with a forked tail that could be seen when the bird banked. The wing-span was large, somewhere in the range of 7½ feet, and the wings were long and backswept, appearing thicker around the carpal joint. All the upperparts were brown or black, and the chin was a pale grey, which extended down onto the throat. The breast and upper belly were white, and all the remaining underparts were dark brown or black. The bill was long and slightly curved with a noticeable hook, and a distinct coral pink in colour. The legs appeared a dark maroon. The flight was absolutely effortless into the wind, and I did not see a single flap.

At the time I thought that the bird must be a female Magnificent Frigate-bird *Fregata magnificens*, and I submitted a description and drawing of it claiming a record of that species to the 'British Birds' Rarities Committee, who rejected it without making any other suggestion as to what it might be. I am indebted to Dr. W. R. P. Bourne for assistance in further attempts to identify it, in which I have also been assisted by Mr. Eugene Eisenmann, M. Christian Jouanin and Dr. Bryan Nelson, who also agree that whatever its precise identity, it appears to have been some kind of frigate-bird *Fregata* sp. and I have been able to confirm this point since moving to the Bahamas, where I have seen many Magnificent Frigate-birds.

However, while clearly a frigate-bird, it does not appear to have been *Fregata magnificens*, the normal species of the North Atlantic, in which the bill and throat are normally dark, and while I have now seen a number of females of that species, none have had the bill other than bluish-horn. The species in which the females are most widely known to have red bills appear to be the Lesser Frigate-bird *Fregata ariel*, with a wide distribution in tropical seas other than the North Atlantic, and the Christmas Frigate-bird *Fregata andrewsi* of the East Indies, but both of these normally have dark chins, which is confirmed by Roger Pocklington (in a letter to Dr. Bourne) from experience of a large number at Christmas Island. In the

remaining species, the Great Frigate-bird *Fregata minor*, the female does have a grey chin, although at Pacific breeding sites as far apart as Laysan, the Galapagos and the Tuamotus, according to Mr. Eisenmann, Dr. Nelson and M. Jouanin, the bill is dark. However, Mr. Eisenmann has pointed out that some specimens of female *F. minor* from South Trinidad in the South Atlantic belonging to the race *nicolli* have pinkish bills in skins, and Dr. Bourne has shown me a bird like this from the British Museum collection of a series of all species in the genus which agrees most closely with the one I saw as does a photograph of a live female *F. minor* taken by Mr. P. J. Gould on Laysan in all features except the dark bill. The most likely interpretation appears to be that the bird I saw in Yorkshire was a female Great Frigate-bird of the South Atlantic race *F. minor nicolli*.

It has been suggested that frigate-birds are sedentary species and do not venture far from land, 200 miles being a figure that is often quoted. However, in their recent analysis of central Pacific ringing recoveries of the Lesser Frigate-bird, F. C. Sibley and R. B. Clapp (*Ibis* 109: 328-337) state that "during . . . pelagic surveys over 40 Great Frigate-birds were seen more than 200 miles from land and no less than nine Great Frigate-birds at distances of 500 miles or more", and go on to list recoveries of Lesser Frigate-birds thousands of miles away from the breeding places, including one in Siberia. The Great Frigate-bird has not been recorded in the North Atlantic before, but the Lesser Frigate-bird, with a similar range in the South Atlantic, was photographed in Maine, New England, in July 1960, (D. Snyder, *Auk* 78: 265), so it seems not impossible that a female Great Frigate-bird might also wander to England.

An instance of apparent sympatry between the Great and Spotted Bowerbirds

by SHANE PARKER

Received 8th December, 1967

The Great Bowerbird, *Chlamydera nuchalis*, and the Spotted Bowerbird, *C. maculata*, appear to be geographical representatives; no mention of range overlap is to be found in Marshall (1954: 72-99).

At Glendower, a property on the Flinders River, near Hughenden, central Queensland, during March and early April 1964, the Spotted Bowerbird was moderately common in the riverine forest bordering the then dry Flinders, and to a lesser extent in the semi-arid woodland further back from the river. Sometimes the species was seen singly, sometimes in groups of up to six. On 4th April I approached to within 10 feet of a Great Bowerbird as it sat drinking at a cattle trough supplied by a nearby bore. The identity of the bird was unmistakable; I had already seen it in large numbers a month before at Charters Towers. This appears to be the first recorded case of any form of sympatry between these two species.

Reference:

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